

OUR VOICE

The Newsletter of Autism Network International

To all the experts
who say that autistic people
are incapable of
insight
self-awareness .
self-expression
thinking about abstract ideas
thinking about other people
and most of all
relating to others
we proudly dedicate
this special issue
in the hope that
we may contribute
to their enlightenment.

"Who Am I?"

I'm not the me you know,
I'm the me I don't know.

If I knew who I am
I could tell you
Who I am.

Am I a stranger?
A stranger to you
A stranger to me
Unknown by either?

I've hidden for so long
I can't find me.
Who am I looking for?
I wish I knew.

It would be easier to find me
if I knew myself better.
But I've run.
Run from who I'm not,
Run from who I am.

Can someone help me
find Myself?

Geneva Wulf

27 Looking Back at 15

I used to think God was punishing me. I was unhappy, disturbed, scared, not comprehending everyday life. I felt I was in a trance. I feel empathy for that teenager. She hurt and no one felt her pain. She lay alone on her tear-soaked pillow. She cried every day. Alone in her world. Not feeling the rhythm of life. She was pulled along like a strip of film by a camera's gears. Other people chose the photos imprinted on the film. She was too confused, overloaded and numb to look through the viewfinder to choose a photo. If only someone would have slowed down and not advanced so rapidly. Every day was a double exposure. I absorbed nothing of the distorted images cast upon me. The final print portrayed the double exposure. Inquisitive people stared down at me to figure out what I was. Depressed? Manic-Depressive? PMS, Borderline Personality Disorder?

What I am is Autistic. I now advance my film in slow motion. I am happy and content with my style of living and of learning. I take the time needed for me to process this adventure called life. I limit the subjects in each frame and focus on a comfortable amount of scenery.

Katherine French

I'm One

One person
one daughter
 mother
 aunt
 grandmother
me??

I'm one
one daughter
 obedient
 submissive
 polite
 no way
well...maybe....

I'm one
one mother
 dependable
 punctual
 organized
 forget it
well...perhaps....

I'm one
one aunt
 entertaining
 helpful
 sweet...
 perhaps.
Well....

I'm one
one granddaughter
 fun
 f fun
 u fun
 n don't I wish
"Tee hee...."

I'm one
one me
scared
introverted
extroverted
PANICKY
never
sometimes
Well...perhaps!

I'm one
one me
confused
looking
ever looking
who knows
I may even find
me!

Geneva Wulf

Pull on a face
A face of their choice
Suit their need
Die underneath
Convinced the facade protects..
Truthfully the facade is the cause of the pain
--or increases the pain

Katherine French

The writings that will be in this newsletter are my thoughts about God. All of them are my personal thoughts and I wrote them so people from all faiths or no faith can think, reflect, agree, disagree, or whatever they want. If anyone of any faith or none wants to add or change any of what is written, please feel free to do so.

Kathy Lissner

GOD IS A GENTLE GOD

I PRAY

I pray when I am walking up and down the street.
I pray when I ride the bus looking out the window.
I pray when the cat bangs on the door to be let in.
I pray when I open up the curtain to let the sun in.
I pray when I am in bed curled up like a hamster.

I pray to God who is called by different names by many people.

Lord, Yahweh, Allah, the Great Spirit, the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), Jesus, Jehovah, and many other names in the tongues of Man.

I pray to the One who is called by many different names.

Everyday man
Facing Mecca
Submitting to
Allah's Will.

Reincarnation

Life is to be
learned from.
If not learned from
in this lifetime,
then another chance
is given to learn
the Lessons again.

Jesus dying
on the Cross
watching his
Mother cry
at his feet.

Faith
without Doubt
would be Nothing
but Emptiness
without Thought.

God is a Verb,
not a noun. So I pray
when I am moving, in action,
doing something, like a verb
in a sentence.

COLUMBIA, MO

Keith Hill, man from the 20th Century, and
Acirema Oscinarf, Number from Planet Sckgoggi
bury young Number teenager, Joshua $X^2-3x+18$,
who committed suicide days earlier.

Josh, buried according to his religion's rites
wrapped up in rolls of paper with equations on it
had no family or friends to honor his death.
Just Keith and Acirema there in the rain digging a shallow
grave for their new found, but dead friend.
After burying Josh; Keith, took out the Rosary and
prayed to the Virgin while Acirema cried and yelled in
anger at God (or Whoever It is) for what has been done.

Keith, Acirema
79

13
John

A portrait of the Holy Family I'd like to see.

I would like to see a painting of Mary, Joseph,
and Jesus laughing.

I imagine the Holy Family eating dinner and their pet donkey
spilled a glass of wine all over the floor and on Mary's clothes.
Joseph is on the floor rolling with laughter while Jesus is
pounding his hands on the table and laughing so hard until he
couldn't breathe. Mary is smiling broadly while letting the
donkey lick the table and her.

God Is.
He said I am,
Not I was or
will be, but
I am.

The most beautiful creature
to me is the paramecium.
Nothing shows the beauty,
complexity, and variety of
the variety God put on
this planet than this tiny
microscopic, one celled
organism. I once read in
a book where the main character
said she expected God to
create planets, stars, and
the Big things. But something
as intricate as the paramecium,
is, to me, how much God cares
for the world.

Life is hell when I
look myself in the mirror
and all I see is the Number 13.
(Zits and all)
Damn, always someone saying
I'm bad luck or evil.
Always someone avoiding me
thinking I'm diseased or
something.

Dad thinks I'm evil or
possessed just because I
look this way.

Kids at school tease me
for it. Consider me bad
luck to hang around. Always
avoiding me in the hallway,
lunch, and even in class.

God I hate it. Don't have
no friends, and my family
couldn't care less if I
died.

Maybe that's why I cause
trouble. No one to care for me
anyhow. They expect trouble,
so I give it.

I'm the Number 13, what
else is to be expected
from a piece of bad luck
like me?


$$X^2 - 3x + 18$$


STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Ever thought about how others
reacted to Jesus' way to death?

Guys making fun of him, putting
the thorns around his head.

"King of the Jews, eh?
Don't look like no royalty to me!
Are you going to get those Roman
idiots out of our country? How
do you feel about that?

King of the Jews, eh?
Where's your army?
Don't see no royal
court. Just you and
a few stupid women.

And you call yourself
king of the Jews? Hah!"

A couple of people in the crowd
wanting Barabbas to be freed.

"Free Barabbas! At least he
fights for our country! Jesus
what's he done? Cause trouble
for us and you! Go ahead
Governor Pilate, waste him!
Throw him to the dogs and let
him rot for a while!
Free Barabbas!"

From a curious onlooker

"Jesus, can't you
save yourself? You
saved others and
created miracles.
Save yourself, man!
You're better than
those blubbering
idiots! Save yourself!
You don't deserve this!"

The guy who nails Jesus to the Cross

"Got to get my quota for nailin'
people to these things. Have to
feed the wife and kids. If I don't
get my quota, Bossman, gets my ass.
Gotta hang this guy. What's he done?
(Looks at the thing saying King of the Jews)
King of the Jews, eh? Guy must be crazy.
Don't look like no king to me. What
they do, let him out of the funny farm?
Gotta nail this guy. Fill my quota.
Gotta put bread on the table and pay
the bills."

The soldiers dividing up Jesus' clothes

1 "Lookie here, nice clothes! Need some."

2 "Lemme see! Wife's been getting after
me to buy new clothes."

1 "Let's divide this up."
(Tries to rip it)

2 "Can't, eh?"

1 "No, but I have a couple
dice. Whoever gets
snake eyes gets the clothes."

2 "Fine, let's go."

(#1 rolls the dice and gets a 5 and a 4)

1 "Damn! Too high!"

(#2 rolls, and gets snake eyes.)

2 "Lookie here! I won! Wife's gonna
like this! I'll take this home,
wash, and wear it."

1 "Damn! Gotta wait until the
next check arrives."

2 "There's a sale at the store downtown
selling the same thing for \$3.99."

Dear Jim Sinclair,

My non-verbal autistic son
Lincoln Grigsby enjoys your newsletter
very much. He's excited about what
the future holds for himself and others
like him and is grateful for the chance
to share ideas and thoughts through
"Our Voice."

"Memories" is the first poem he
ever wrote. He had been using

facilitated communication a few
months and through this technique
came the opportunity to share his gift.
"Freedom Fears" was written just
before he moved to an apartment of his
own.

Thanks for the wonderful work
you're doing.

Joan Grigsby

Memories

Memories bring me great joy sometimes
They go in nice happy circles
that die quickly
High rides that make me spin
Great clarity for happy times
My heart has good feelings for my memories
Memories hold great value to me sometimes

Freedom Fears

My move keeps coming
My independence is fearfully close at hand.
Ready to begin my new life alone.
Strange to fear what I've longed for for so long.
Keep my place in your heart,
Join me in my newfound freedom.
Life is each day
One step at a time.
I'll trust myself to feel this growing pain
And survive
Ready to crawl. Ready to fly.
Really ready. Really afraid.

Lincoln Grigsby

Changeling Lullaby

Echoes from a shadow world:

*You're mine
I love you*

Shards of someone's shattered dreams:

*Come here
I need you*

Voices calling in the darkness

I will never let you go

To someone who was never there:

I will ~~make~~ you look at me

Raging fire, desperate hunger:

I couldn't bear to set you free

From a past that never was:

Once I held you in my arms

To a future long forgotten:

When will you come back to me?

All that your love says to me:

My dreams died when you came to be.

Jim Sinclair

On passing

Walk in,
fake a smile,
say "hello." (What nice hair)
Someone's smiling,
talking too,
can't be me. I'm not there.

Here she comes.
All arms.
Can't pull away (oh no!)
look relaxed
move slowly
perhaps then the panic won't show.

His hand.
Here it comes.
He expects mine (oh yuk!)
out it goes.
Can't offend.
His hand sweats (just my luck!)

They talk,
they giggle.
What can it be?
They change the subject,
I wonder why.
Is it me?

Look around.
Happy faces.
Are they laughing? Must be fun!
I'll wake up
I'll see... but...
I'd rather run.

One more day,
one more hour,
breath holding makes me dizzy.
But I don't breathe, I forget,
they won't notice,
they're too busy.

A dirty look
aimed at me.
What'd I do? I don't know!
Did I offend or neglect?
I don't recall,
I don't think so.

There must be a code,
a language unspoken,
their "passing" thoughts... silence
I can't hear it.
Am I broken?

I'm trying to think
the music blares on.
It doesn't hurt them... just me.
It echoes.
It pounds.
It's killing... just me.

Oh, my ears
Oh, my head
I can't think straight,
the noise resounds,
I can't stand it.

Goodbye!

Geneva Wulf

Feeling Love and Being Aware of the World

As my heart fills with joy, yet feels all the pain
I question myself have I made any gain
'Cause the world where I was doesn't have a road back
The sign said one way now look where I'm at
In a grown-up body with the spirit of a child
Where the rules of this world upon me are piled
Yet I'm striving forward can't you all see
To be the best that I can be

Won't you please look past my far-away gaze
And into my heart where hope fills my days
That the effort to join "your" world as my own
Will someday allow me to feel at home
'Cause it's frightening to be in a new atmosphere
When what I experience isn't quite clear
Yet I'm striving forward can't you all see
To be the best that I can be

Katherine French

SHE SAYS, HE SAYS: PROGRESS REPORTS FROM A MIXED MARRIAGE

by Lauren and Dan Wiebe

Lauren says:

Dan and I have been married for just about 10 months now, and we're very, very happy. There have only been a couple of instances so far where we've gotten horribly upset at each other. I hesitate to call these "arguments", because they usually turn out to be misunderstandings rather than a real difference of opinion.

It's interesting being married to someone who doesn't read the "normal" body language, expressions, voice intonations, etc., that I just take for granted everyone does....I've learned that I have to be very *explicit* in the information I give him....I can't expect him to hear such-and-such a tone in my voice, or know what I want unless I clearly tell him. And it can also lead to confusion when I'm on the receiving end of something that I (without even thinking) interpret in a particular way, only to find out that Dan didn't mean that at all!

For example, when I'd hear Dan give a big sigh, I'd immediately wonder what was wrong. I'm used to a sigh signaling boredom, frustration, etc. But Dan says that for him it's purely physical....just clearing air out of his lungs, and that it means nothing. Once I asked him to do some simple thing, and he sighed. I started to feel very resentful that my request should be such a big burden for him....and then I remembered that the sigh was in no way connected to my request....a difficult thing for me to keep at the forefront of my mind.

I know that Dan has to work *hard* at living with me (he's the autistic one, so it's much harder for him to function in a "normal" world with a "normal" wife). But I also have to

work hard at living with him. I sometimes feel as though I suffer from "culture shock"....I'm sure he feels the same way.

In the end, the bottom line is that we both love each other very much. Any marriage has to be worked at. Perhaps we're more fortunate than most because we've realized from the beginning that we're going to have to work hard and not take anything for granted. And when I get to the point that I feel so frustrated I could scream (it doesn't happen very often, but it does happen now and then), I just stop and remember how much I love him. Compared with that, my frustration (and everything else) suddenly becomes trivial.

In the 10 months since we've been married, there have been about three times that I've said to myself in frustration, "Why couldn't I have married someone *normal*?" But if Dan were "normal", he wouldn't be Dan....and if he weren't Dan, I wouldn't be in love with him. And for every time his autism drives me absolutely crazy, there are 4 or 5 times that it simply delights me. And I wouldn't trade him for anyone else on earth.

Dan says:

I'd have to agree with what Lauren says about being "very, very" happy. I wasn't particularly happy (in the general sense) immediately after we got married, because I was unemployed. Less than two months later, though, I got a job (with CompuServe) that I positively love—it's hard to see how it could be any better—and now I'm practically delirious. A wife, two kids, a house, a dog, and a wonderful job; what more could a fellow ask?

So far ours has been a pretty successful marriage on its own, without any help; but we're both very committed to it, and should it in the future become less than stellar for some reason, we'll do whatever we have to make it healthy again. As Lauren said, there have been a couple of incompatibilities and misunderstandings, some of which have from one side or the other seemed insurmountable at the time; but we've always managed to work it out eventually (don't think we've ever needed more than 24 hours so far) and end up closer than before.

I've learned quite a bit about being a husband in ten months; I still have a little ways to go, but I've got a lot farther to go in learning how to be a father—especially to somebody else's half-grown kids. I screw up sometimes, but I think I'm getting slowly better. (Probably about the time they leave home, I'll just be getting the hang of it!)

Lauren writes:

"I know that Dan has to work hard at living with me (he's the autistic one, so it's much harder for him to function in a 'normal' world with a 'normal' wife). But I also have to work hard at living with him. I sometimes feel as though I suffer from 'culture shock'....I'm sure he feels the same way."

Here I have to slightly disagree. I think probably Lauren works harder at living with me than I do at living with her, simply because for me, living with her is just an extension of what I've been doing all my life—interacting with normal people. I have a lot more experiential basis for that, I suspect, than she does for interacting with an autistic person. There are things about her that I don't—and probably

never will—understand, but as long as I can draw circles around them and say, "What's inside this circle I don't understand, but what's outside I do," things are okay. I tend to get really worked up if I can't even draw the circle; but eventually I always manage to succeed.

Lauren says that the most important thing in our marriage is that we love each other; I would agree that that's very important, but at least as important, I think, and possibly even more important, is the fact that we're both devout Christian believers, and we try very hard to keep God at the center of our relationship—if we both stay reconciled to God, then it's generally very small potatoes to be reconciled to each other. We pray together, worship together, sing together, and so on; God is such a big part of the set of things we have in common that it's hard for me to see how couples who don't share a strong faith make it.

Before we were married, there were several times I hesitated, thinking that perhaps marrying Lauren would be a mistake, but since we've been married I haven't looked back once. Lauren is a wonderful person and I'm incredibly lucky that she happened to be the one God chose for me. When I was in high school or thereabouts, I decided to resign myself to the fact that I would almost certainly never get married, because I was weird enough that no woman could ever bring herself to spend a lifetime with me; now I must amend that resignation: I'm weird enough that only a very special one-in-a-million sort of woman could ever bring herself to spend a lifetime with me. My dad gave me good advice: "Son, never marry anyone until you find someone you can't live without."

I guess that's about it...

Inside Outside, Outside In

I try to find out.
Am I really who I am?
Am I deep—or shallow?
Am I smart—or dumb?
Am I retarded—or gifted?
I see life through different lenses.
No one sees like I do.
I don't see like others do.
How can I understand
A world I can't see?

I speak
but not always
the words I think.

I hear
but not always
the words you say.

How can I understand
when the words change?
How can I speak
when the words stop?

I can't say it
I feel it
I smell it
I taste it
I hear it
but not always what's there!

So I retreat.
The only safe place is "away"
The only safe time is "when"
The only safe place is
"nowhere"

Any "away" will do.
If I can't leave,
I just won't stay.

You'll see me.
You'll think you see me,
But I'm not here.
But...I'm not...I left
I'm away.
(I'll come back when it's safe.)

Geneva Wulf

Love Without Bruising

I have a special friend
who's always close to me
even though she lives so far away.

My friend and I don't touch
not much

We might hug goodbye sometimes
with quilted coats already on

then again, we might not.
It doesn't matter.

I went to see my friend one time.
We wrote letters to each other.
She handed me a letter the night I got there
and I kept it overnight
and read it in the morning.
Then I wrote a letter back to her
and slipped it under her bedroom door
and went out to walk my dogs.

"I wonder if you lived close if I'd be able to touch you"
my friend wrote to me

and I wrote back
"I don't know if we'll ever touch in this dimension.
It doesn't matter to me
either way is fine
because in that deeper place I can always feel you
no matter where I am."

We drove somewhere
and my friend saw
a bear
a little toy bear
that should mean
safety, and comfort, and warmth, and love

a little bear
lying
discarded
by the train tracks
under the cold gray sky.
My friend stopped her car
and got out
and picked up the bear
and hugged it.

I went home
and a few weeks later
I talked to my friend on the phone
and she told me
"I have bruised ribs from sleeping on you."

Sleeping on me?
I was far away
and I didn't touch her
even when I was with her.

But she explained
it was the bear
the bear she named Jim
to remember my visit
the bear she slept with
and he bruised her ribs.

So she put the bear
above her bed
where she can see him every night
and know he's always there
and she can remember
and know I love her
and not be bruised.

How can any touch
say more of love
than this?

Jim Sinclair

HOMINIDS SOCIALIZING

by Carolyn Baird and Gershon Blackmore

[Editor's note: The following is a dialogue that took place on the Autism and Developmental Disabilities discussion list on the Internet. The participants are both HFA/Asperger syndrome adults. Both work in fields that autistic people are usually considered inherently unqualified for—Carolyn is a linguist, and Gershon is a psychotherapist and rabbi. Both have found fulfilling intimate relationships with a (non-autistic) "special other." Both are parents—of autistic as well as non-autistic children.

The discussion started when I made the innocent (I thought) observation that "an autistic person who has no noticeable characteristics of autism but is nevertheless unable to 'perform' socially in the ways expected of a normal person is at a disadvantage, since there are no visible signs to alert people that they need to modify their expectations."]

CAROLYN:

Stuff *their* expectations! We're not trained guinea pigs. Sure, we're at a disadvantage in such situations, but if you've developed the ability to laugh at yourself and have enough self-confidence not to be concerned about what other people think (which seems to come easy to autistics—since they have difficulty understanding what other people think at any time), it's amazing how much "weird" behavior it's possible to get away with even in the most formal of situations. At those times though it's an advantage not to be with anyone close to you who knows you're abnormal—it's their embarrassment that is the most damaging thing. Strangers are far more accepting of social blunders.

GERSHON:

I just want to clarify where I am coming from emotionally and philosophically, being an HFA and also a parent of an HFA. This is not my final word because I'm still coming to terms with my HFA-ness.

There seem to be a couple of "populations" (shrink-talk for groups) in our list community. There are

people who are dealing with really puzzling, outrageous behavior in the children that they have loved from the beginning, and the power of this love drives a need to help these children to fit in to a world that feels a lot like Beirut to "normal" people. How a parent in this situation would not hope for a "cure" or a way to make this nightmarish stuff go away is beyond me.

As a parent who has dealt, in our case quite well, with teachers, teams, CSE's, IEP planning, and school professionals, I know quite well that Marian and I have had to become tigerish at times to deal with the few idiots in the school district who could not deal with what Avi is about. I say "few" because we struck a gold mine in our school district re: special ed people.

The other population is of autistics of various types (I use Asperger-type and Kanner-type as loose poles on the continuum) who are trying to make sense of their experience and the world as autistic people. I also belong to that group. I have mentioned times that I was cruising along, thinking things were finally going smoothly for me professionally, when I've been slammed by people around me who completely—and I mean 180 degrees—misapprehended what I was

doing or saying. This has created in me, at times, feelings of hopelessness or discouragement—sort of, no matter how hard I try, I still can't "pass" out there.

It seems to me that the "stuff their expectations" stance is one way to cope with this kind of constant discouragement. It's one that some folks seem comfortable with, or are forced by life circumstance to feel comfortable with. I'm not totally comfortable with it. The scientist/biologist/psychologist in me is forced to affirm that humans are, after all, a social hominid species and that autism really does mess up the "social" part big-time. We're social hominids whether we like it or not. And, the rabbi and spiritual person in me believes the results of the first empirical study of human beings on record, an n=1 study reported in Genesis: "It is not good for (a man) to be alone." If I feel longings for connection with others, even as my whatever-ness keeps me from it, it's because (I believe) that we are genetically and spiritually designed to be social creatures. That longing is as natural to me as is my retreat from social situations and inability, at times, to actualize that longing because I have a form of autism.

As a therapist who does psychotherapy with developmentally whatever-ed people, I have felt, deeply, the pain of young people who tell me in facilitation that they want to have relationships or are sexually attracted to others. I don't, yet, know what to tell them, because severe Kanner's syndrome is so global, so volatile, and so socially weird that they are likely to remain frustrated for a long time. So if something could make this all go poof, I'd go for it in a minute if it were my kid.

Nonetheless, I think that the non-autistic folks can learn a lot from the autistic people who have found

voices. My particular voice is freighted with baggage from a childhood spent with people who hadn't the foggiest idea what I was about and used abuse and ridicule to try to "train" me out of my weird behaviors. I have never experienced a positive behavioral regime, though I believe they do exist. What some of us supposedly "anti-behavior" people object to is the idea that behaviorism constitutes any kind of cure. Provides tools, yes. Provides critical information on communication processsing, yes. Transmits information on living, yes. But not a cure. The autism goes on and on.

Hence, there is a moment in the life of the autistic person when he/she has to come to terms with the pervasiveness and permanence of the autistic lebenswelt. I'm struggling with that now. People array themselves along points of a continuum, between trying and trying to blend in and saying "to hell with it." I'm drifting somewhere near the middle. I can't say "to hell with it" because I don't believe that. I also feel claustrophobic and furious whenever someone talks of "training" me or anyone out of autistic behavior. I and my son immediately feel at home around autistic people, like we can breathe, like we are not alone. So I still feel like I'm floating.

I hope this ramblement sheds some heat or light on how emotionally charged the "indistinguishable" thread really is, and on why it won't go away very soon.

CAROLYN:

I'm not sure which category I fit into, but I know I haven't always felt comfortable ignoring other people's expectations of how I should behave, so I guess it must be the latter one. For years I tried very hard to live up to

the expectations of others, but every night when I went to bed my head would be filled with self-doubts and self-recreminations and I would wind up crying myself to sleep—I just couldn't cope being that way, but it wasn't until the welfare of my children was threatened that I was forced to become the "real me"; to stand up and fight back and to do what I intuitively knew was the "right" thing whether it was "socially acceptable" or not.

Is society threatened by my attitude of "above all be true to yourself"? Wouldn't society be strengthened if more people felt comfortable being themselves?

You said:

The scientist/biologist/psychologist in me is forced to affirm that humans are, after all, a social hominid species and that autism really does mess up the 'social' part big-time. We're social hominids whether we like it or not.

Are we? I'm not so sure about me. I like to be on my own. When I was a teenager I lived in a boarding house and I came to be known as the "weekend hermit." I'd disappear into my room on Friday night after returning from work and only come out to use the kitchen or bathroom facilities, but since I did that at odd hours I rarely ran into anyone else. It was only after I'd been there 12 months and the other inhabitants started invading my privacy of a weekend because they thought I must be very lonely and wanted to rescue me from my "despair" that I moved out.

And, the rabbi and spiritual person in me believes the results of the first empirical study of human beings on record, an n=1 study reported

in Genesis: "It is not good for (a man) to be alone."

I think I'd add to that "for too long." But I agree! However, it doesn't say that any more than one other person is desirable. I prefer the company of only one other person at a time. I can tolerate being in company with three other people but once the "crowd" gets bigger than that I start having problems.

If I feel longings for connection with others, even as my whatever-ness keeps me from it, it's because (I believe) that we are genetically and spiritually designed to be social creatures. That longing is as natural to me as is my retreat from social situations and inability, at times, to actualize that longing because I have a form of autism.

So, you see your "autism" as preventing you from being the "real person" you were meant to be? Why do I find that so sad? I am "who I am" not "what I am" and I see the "autism" as being an integral part of the "who" not the "what."

As a therapist who does psychotherapy with developmentally whatever-ed people, I have felt, deeply, the pain of young people who tell me in facilitation that they want to have relationships or are sexually attracted to others.

You don't have to be a "social hominid" to crave "one special other" do you?

I don't, yet, know what to tell them, because severe Kanner's syndrome is so

global, so volatile, and so socially weird that they are likely to remain frustrated for a long time.

Such a dismal outlook. Many normal people spend most of their lives looking for that special someone to fill the empty void to no avail. They're no better off than the people you see. For although they are surrounded by people, it's far worse to be lonely in a crowd than being lonely just because you're on your own—that's one advantage that autistics have over the normal population and besides how can you be sure that there's not some wonderful Kanner's syndrome person of the opposite sex about to bump into them? There's no way of knowing for certain what the future holds, but we can all maximize the possibility of future outcomes if we so wish. Do your "people" ever communicate through facilitation with each other?

QUESTION:

Carolyn responded to my "social hominid" essay by saying a lot of very eloquent things such as:

Are we? I'm not so sure about me. I like to be on my own. When I was a teenager I lived in a boarding house and I came to be known as the "weekend hermit." I'd disappear into my room on Friday night after returning from work and only come out to use the kitchen or bathroom facilities, but since I did that at odd hours I rarely ran into anyone else. It was only after I'd been there 12 months and the other inhabitants started invading my privacy of a weekend because they thought I must be very lonely and wanted to

rescue me from my "despair" that I moved out.

I think I need to clarify my point a bit. Humans are a social hominid species, which means that the assumptive world of the people "out there" is based on a social model of being human. This is precisely what makes being autistic so difficult, because nothing "out there" seems to be designed for "us." I am genetically a social hominid; I am temperamentally, like you, not a sociable hominid. I see nothing wrong with being myself, and asserting my right to be myself. But the very existence of this list, and the fervent use that we non-sociable types make of it, testifies to the push, deep down, to connect. We need to connect to someone who speaks our language, sees the same vividness and color in things, who understands what purple and blue glass is all about, who speaks cat and loon and dog dialects.

I share your temperament in which it is hard to relate to more than one or two people at a time. I like to talk to people who can deal with how slowly I talk (in autistic standard time, not pedantic savings time) and who love to bend language into pretzels and chew on them for a while. However, as an American Male, acculturated to this ethic (shared by ozzies, I think) that you have to take care of your Sheila and the wallies economically etc., I feel this push to go out there and "make it." You know, the voice inside that says, "If you're so intelligent, why haven't you done thus and so by now?" The countercultural part of me says THWT, but I remain conflicted.

I would like nothing better than to be a, um, ah, highly respected, um, ah, expert, ah, thinker, tinkerer, fixer-upper, writer, solderer, observer, annotator, and consumer of noodles. This fits, however, nobody's

job description. I am a pretty good psychotherapist. But, as one famous New Yorker cartoon recently said, "The problem with the examined life is that it doesn't generate much income." And I do have a bloke and a ballerina to put through college.

Just give me a log cabin in the North woods, a lake full of trout and loons, dark skies for observing, and computerized contact with the rest of the world, and I'd be happy. So would my Marian. See, I did find somebody who could tolerate my weirdness (and you haven't guessed the half of it). But with autism comes a capacity for deep empathy with a lot of things, and it is hard to go around unaware that there is something deeply wrong with the world's rhythm and meaning. Gear stripped somewhere. Out of oil. The whine is getting louder. I can't be an aware, unsociable, social hominid without hearing that bloody whine all the time. Which is why I spend my time trying to do something about it, talking to people who come from the corner of Hell and East Broadway. All of which makes me kind of loopy by Friday night. Which it is, here.

So "social hominids" doesn't describe what we should be, but what we are. It is social hominid language and cueing that you and I probably heard as some kind of "blamety blamety bip-bop" in school among the "others," wondering what the hell it was they meant. But the world seems to turn on mastery of that blamety bip-bop, whether we like it or not. I still look with amazement at people who Get Things Done, who are Movers and Shakers, who with some mythic ease move in and out of that social swirl speaking their well-mannered and always understood blamety bip-bop. All those words, and winks, and nudges, and signals, and "understoods." People with neat desks!!!! Yeech! I make one humorous comment about noodles and cheese and I have the whole flaming

autism list in a bother!

Well, enough blatherment for now. Good to talk to you again.

A non-sociable social hominid (Gershon).

CAROLYN:

I think I need to clarify my point a bit. Humans are a social hominid species, which means that the assumptive world of the people "out there" is based on a social model of being human. This is precisely what makes being autistic so difficult, because nothing "out there" seems to be designed for "us." I am genetically a social hominid; I am temperamentally, like you, not a sociable hominid. I see nothing wrong with being myself, and asserting my right to be myself.

I'm glad you explained what you meant—the difference between the two makes sense to me now.

But the very existence of this list, and the fervent use that we non-sociable types make of it, testifies to the push, deep down, to connect. We need to connect to someone who speaks our language, sees the same vividness and color in things, who understands what purple and blue glass is all about, who speaks cat and loon and dog dialects.

Not to mention lizard and frog. Two years ago I probably wouldn't have agreed with that, since I'd not met anyone who thought like me except my children and there's too much emotional baggage in those relationships to be able to make the type of "autistic"

connection that you're talking of and since I'd never experienced it, I had no way of knowing what I was missing. Yes, I did feel a "spiritual loneliness" but I've always found that prayer helps that. However, since I joined the Internet and subsequently this list and started conversations with other autistics (off the list mainly) I've come to realize that there was a part of me that had never been really "happy or satisfied" before. Still, the "need" for this autistic connection is not as strong as "normal" people's need for human contact seems to be. I try very hard to keep up with my email since I feel that if people write to me I have an obligation to at least respond in a reasonable time, but despite my good intentions I often find that I put off answering email for days, weeks, sometimes even months, particularly if there's a problem with the system and I can't answer immediately. This behavior is really not much different from the way I interact in "real" life.

I share your temperament in which it is hard to relate to more than one or two people at a time. I like to talk to people who can deal with how slowly I talk (in autistic standard time, not pedantic savings time) and who love to bend language into pretzels and chew on them for a while.

Now, I know why I've never rung you up. The cost of that international call would totally bankrupt me. Being an Aussie has its advantages—I'm supposed to have a 'drawl' and since I've eliminated all the "ah"s and "um"s from my speech, most people just put my slow speech down to a difference of dialect.

However, as an American Male, acculturated to this ethic

(shared by ozzies, I think) that you have to take care of your Sheila and the wallies economically etc., I feel this push to go out there and "make it." You know, the voice inside that says "If you're so intelligent, why haven't you done thus and so by now?" The countercultural part of me says THWT, but I remain conflicted.

Yes, a lot of male Aussies still suffer from that, but with the the high rate of unemployment in this area which has affected graduates as much as the blue collar workers, the "inner voices" are starting to chant a different tune. Our social welfare system is such that it's possible to say THWT and still be able to provide the family with the essentials of life.

I would like nothing better than to be a, um, ah, highly respected, um, ah, expert, ah, thinker, tinkerer, fixer-upper, writer, solderer, observer, annotator, and consumer of noodles. This fits, however, nobody's job description.

Don't be too sure about that! The government pays me to do just that and all I have to do is take a form into Social Security every 12 weeks to say I haven't done any work in that time.

I am a pretty good psychotherapist. But, as one famous New Yorker cartoon recently said, "The problem with the examined life is that it doesn't generate much income." And I do have a bloke and a ballerina to put through college.

True, there's not much income

doing it my way, I can't afford to buy a new hot water system for another couple of months (mine sprung a leak two months ago), for instance, but provided I recognize my priorities and budget to be able to afford them, none of the family has to miss out on anything.

Just give me a log cabin in the North woods, a lake full of trout and loons, dark skies for observing, and computerized contact with the rest of the world, and I'd be happy. So would my Marian. See, I did find somebody who could tolerate my weirdness (and you haven't guessed the half of it). But with autism comes a capacity for deep empathy with a lot of things, and it is hard to go around unaware that there is something deeply wrong with the world's rhythm and meaning. Gear stripped somewhere. Out....

There's no doubt left in my mind that our brains function on the same wavelength. (I only deleted your remaining two paragraphs because I was running short of time, but I could have reiterated all that you said.)

Well, enough blatherment for now. Good to talk to you again.

Thanks. I find it extremely "satisfying" to talk to you too.

Carolyn - call me anything..... anytime.

I don't know, I just do!

I relate.

I don't know how,
but I do.

People I don't know
Autistic people,
we relate.

I just know
they look at me
they look in me
We commune.

They look in me
I look in them
We communicate.

.I like it.

We communicate
who knows how
we just do.

Geneva Wulf

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